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H Select Committee on Assassinations

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CIA HISTORICAL-REVIEW PROGRAM

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4 October 1976

Q.A.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: House Select Committee on Assassinations

1. On Tuesday, 27 September, I met with Mr. Tiny Hutton, Administrative Assistant to Representative Thomas Downing (D., Va.), and staff member Rick Feeney, to discuss the newly designated House Select Committee on Assassinations (membership list attached). Mr. Hutton asked for the meeting when I called inquiring as to when the Committee would be initiating their investigation. At that time, Mr. Hutton advised that rumors were being circulated by certain "spooks" that "uncomplimentary" information would be released if certain people who were being considered for top staff positions were hired. The CIA was not specifically mentioned but the impression left was that the Agency was involved. I had earlier called Frank Slatinshek, Chief Counsel, House Armed Services Committee, and he suggested that I call Hutton and Thad Murray, in the office of Representative Bob Daniel (R., Va.).

2. Hutton said that Mr. Downing has discounted the credibility of the rumors that were circulated concerning certain people that were being considered for top staff positions on the Committee. He recognized that these people are controversial and are the subject of attacks by a number of rival groups. He was certain that the Agency would not in any way have been involved.

3. Hutton explained that Mr. Downing's interest in this matter arose from discussions he had with Bernard Fensterwald and Bob Morrow, who claims past association with the Agency, concerning the assassination of President Kennedy. Based on what information they and others provided him,

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Mr. Downing felt that the Warren Commission had not been provided all pertinent information, particularly concerning the Agency's efforts to assassinate Castro. He feels that this has created considerable doubts in many people's minds and the matter should be made public to complete the record and close the matter for all time. Fensterwald greatly influenced Mr. Downing and actually wrote most of Mr. Downing's floor statements on the subject. The House Rules Committee was reluctant to establish the Select Committee and Downing was not pushing for it; however, due to the efforts of the Black Caucus to extend the investigation into the assassination of Martin Luther King, the Resolution was reported out and passed the House.

4. Mr. Downing has always strongly supported the Agency and does not want to in any way harm us. He would abide by any ground rules the Agency would necessarily have to impose but would hope that the Agency does not deny the Committee information which is vital to their investigation. He was considering appointing Fensterwald as Staff Director but abandoned this when he realized that he is a controversial figure; however, he is considering using his services as a consultant. Mr. Downing was considering several people for Staff Director and General Counsel, who would be objective and not have preconceived theories.

5. Mr. Downing's approach is to narrow his inquiry and not take a shotgun approach. The House Resolution directs the inquiry to be preliminary and to continue in the next Congress. However, Mr. Downing hopes to resolve the matter and present a final report in January. He fears the continuance of the Select Committee in the next Congress since Representative Henry Gonzalez (D., Tex.) would be Chairman and he considers Mr. Gonzalez unreliable and subject to persuasion by the wrong people.

6. Rick Feeney, who has a TS clearance with Naval Intelligence, will serve on the Committee. Feeney expressed strong support for the Agency and recognizes that the theories on the President Kennedy assassination by Fensterwald and others have been refuted. He said he will do everything he can to keep the inquiry in proper perspective and not go down paths that have already been covered. If any matters of extreme sensitivity arise, he would want only the Chairman advised. Feeney will first review the Warren Commission report and will call for the classified reports referred to Archives by the Commission. He does not know at this time what, if any, information he may request from the Agency. In this regard, he has reviewed the material Fensterwald has gotten from the Agency on the Kennedy assassination under FOIA. (I understand there is much additional material on this subject now under FOIA review to release to Fensterwald and a number of other requesters.) Feeney said he would be back to me when he completes his review.

7. As suggested by Frank Slatinshek, I called Thad Murray, in Mr. Daniel's office. Murray said he feels the Select Committee is a loser and should never have been established. He questions the objectivity and sincerity of Fensterwald and others who are influencing Mr. Downing. He was offered Staff Director but turned it down. Mr. Daniel was going to co-sponsor the bill in hopes of an objective inquiry but backed down when he found out who the people were who were behind it. Murray offered to be of assistance in any way that he can. I chatted with Representative Lucien Nedzi (D., Mich.) today and he shared the concerns that the investigation will be nonproductive.

8. Today, I delivered a package of Agency documents concerning Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassination which were released to Bernard Fensterwald and a number of other requesters under FOIA. Hutton informed me that Mr. Downing had chosen Richard A. Sprague, a Philadelphia lawyer and former prosecutor who prosecuted Tony Boyle. Attached is a copy of the announcement.

9. Mr. Downing will be in Washington most of the time during the investigation and will follow it closely. Most of the other Members will be in their Districts compaigning and will probably have little involvement in the investigation.

10. I recommend that the Agency not gear up for a full scale investigation but sit tight for the time being until the Select Committee defines the scope of their inquiry. I will determine from Scott Breckinridge, Deputy Inspector General, and others the volume of material involved and what they may judge will be pertinent to the Select Committee and will keep appropriate offices informed.

Patrick L. Carpentier

PATRICK L. CARPENTIER
Assistant Legislative Counsel

Attachments

Distribution:
Orig. - Subject Fiel w/atts
1 - Mr. Bolten w/atts
1 - OGC w/atts
1 - Mr. Fendig w/atts
1 - Mr. Breckinridge w/atts
1 - DDI w/atts 1 - DDA w/atts
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1 - PLC/Soft File w/atts.

OLC:PLC:dla (4 Oct. 1976)

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